

THE MAKING OF A POET

Very little separated the connoisseur from the writer of *kāvya*. This is shown by the fact that a great many critics themselves wrote poetry and that poets possessed critical knowledge that was frequently profound. At the very least they had to be familiar with poetics and allied sciences such as grammar, metrics, lexicography and semantics, but many of them were in fact paṇḍits. Since they were expected to deal with things in a factual manner, and in any case the majority liked to embellish their poetry with learned matter, the sciences that were closely allied in a narrow sense were not enough and a knowledge of numerous other fields was required, above all of erotics (*kāmaśāstra*), logic (*nyāya*), the arts (*kalā*), political science (*arthaśāstra*) and familiarity with such important sources of literary material as the epics *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* as well as the *Purāṇas*.

Theorists sum up these disciplines under the heading *vyutpatti* (also *śruta* or *abhyāsa*), translated as « training » or « the acquisition of knowledge », and they count *vyutpatti* as being one of the qualifications (*kāvyaḥetu*) which are necessary for a practising writer. A man is therefore qualified as a poet if he has poetic imagination (*pratibhā*¹), possesses the required education (*vyutpatti*) and constantly devotes himself to exercises (*abhiyoga*, *prayatna*) both as a beginner and, later, as an experienced writer. The second and third requirements for the composition of *kāvya*, i.e., the study of various sciences and of other authors, and of continually doing exercises, are often lumped together into one which, also called *vyutpatti* or *abhyāsa*, combines reading with practice. *Vyutpatti* thus summed up is the writer's experience, his training, which, when fully completed, was often a laborious one to which the poet usually had to dedicate most of his time.

1. This is the most common term, but Daṇḍin and Vāmana use *pratibhāna* and Maṃmaṭa uses *śakti*.

In general a writer did these exercises either by himself or under the guidance of an experienced teacher — a poet or a paṇḍit — or, in the case of a mature author, among his fellow-poets in the *goṣṭhī*. The exercises might be designed, for example, to give mastery of metrical patterns, to practise imitation or to impart skill in completing intentionally unfinished stanzas. An easier exercise which must have appealed to beginners consisted in composing stanzas in various forms paying attention only to euphony and the metrical rules without having to consider whether the words and the order in which they were used formed a correct sentence. The following stanza is a good example of this sort of euphonic-metrical exercise. The verse form is the *Indra-vajrā*. The choice of words, however, is quite clearly determined by the mellifluous weak consonants, particularly the link *nd*:

ānandasandohapadāravinda-
kundendukandoditabinduvṛndam /
indindirāndolitamandamanda-
niṣyandanandanmakarandavandyam // ²

Another exercise, intended to test the pupil's vocabulary, was to find synonyms for certain words in a stanza which was often taken from the work of some prominent poet. Synonym books and other works of reference, such as Vopadeva's dictionary *Kavikalpadruma*, «The Poet's Wishing-Tree»³, were frequently used for this exercise. Others, such as Kavindrācārya Sarasvatī's *Kavindrakalpadruma*⁴, contained models for creative literary work which the author expressly stated were intended to serve the novice as a kind of poetry primer. An example taken from the introductory stanza of Kālidāsa's *Raghuvamśa* will illustrate how a vocabulary exercise may work. The original version runs:

vāg-arthāṁ iva saṁprktau vāg-arthapratipattaye /
jagataḥ pitarau vande pārvatī-parameśvarau // ⁵

The exercise, which also aims at developing metrical skill, now requires that synonyms be substituted for certain parts of the sentence, in this

2. Kṣemendra, *Kavikanṭhābharana* I, 21. The stanza consists of two long compounds divided equally between the two halves. With the exception of the two final members *vṛnda* and *vandyā*, the words are prior members arranged in a row one after the other. A translation might give something like the following meaningless series of word: «Multitudes of joy, lotus-foot, jasmine, moon, drops arisen from roots; (large) bee, swinging, slowly dropping down, rejoicing, flowerjuice, to be venerated».

3. Vopadeva Gosvami, *Kavikalpadruma*. Critically ed. by G. B. Palsule, Poona, 1945 (= Sources of Indo-Aryan Lexicography).

4. Cf. J. Eggeling, *Catalogue of the Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*, Part VII, London, 1904, No. 3947.

5. *Raghuv.* I, 1. «So that (I) may be granted word and meaning, I greet you, Pārvatī and the Highest (i.e., Śiva), parents of the world, twined together like word and meaning».

case the words *vāc*, *sampr̥kta*, *pitr̥*, *pārvatī* and *parameśvara*. These synonyms must be of the same length as the words replaced and must fit the metrical system exactly.

vāṇy-arthāṁ iva samyuktau vāṇy-arthapratipattaye /
jagato janakau vande śarvāṇī-śaśīśekharaḥ //⁶

Theorists are united in believing that it is when the poet is working under the above demands that *pratibhā* is of the greatest importance. H. Jacobi's rendering of *pratibhā* as «poetic or creative imagination» is probably the best. It is partly the «flashing upon the thought» (*prati-bhā*) of an illuminating artistic idea in the mind of the poet and partly the particular ability (*śakti*) to turn it to good account, i.e., to utilise the idea in some poem, long or short, and give it concrete expression in form and content (*artha* and *śabda*). Most critics regard this ability as being a natural gift (*naisargika*) with which one is born (*sahaja*) but, like Daṇḍin and Rudraṭa, consider it possible that poetic talent, even when it is not innate, can be acquired to a certain extent by diligent practice and veneration of the goddess Sarasvatī⁷. This sort of late development is, however, always laborious. Daṇḍin, Rudraṭa, Rājaśekhara and others let it clearly be understood that acquired *pratibhā* is definitely inferior to natural talent. Even genuine poetic imagination is not a gift from above which descends on a poet more or less by chance, as is generally supposed. On the contrary, it is an acquired faculty gained by merit of acts (*karman*) performed in previous existences which have influenced the poet's mind in such a way that they have left behind a residue of latent mental impressions (*saṁskāra*) which has matured in his present life to genuine, innate *pratibhā*⁸. An acute definition, even by modern standards of literary criticism, is that given by Abhinavagupta who, when taking up Ānandavardhana's ideas, called poetic imagination a sort of intuitive ability (*prajñā*) which enables the poet continually to create something new which strikes the reader, too, as original⁹.

6. Kṣemendra, *loc. cit.*

7. Exceptions are, for example, Vāmana and Jagannātha. Vāmana, who accepts genuine *pratibhā* alone, is of the opinion that any attempt to acquire poetic talent by one's own efforts can only excite laughter; see *Kāvya-lamkārasūtravṛtti* ad. I, 3, 16: *yasmād* (i.e., *pratibhānād*) *vinā kāvyam na niṣpadyate niṣpannam vā hāsyāyatanam syāt*. Jagannātha, on the other hand, although also recognizing a single power of imagination (*Rasagaṅgādhara*, VBhSG, p. 25: *kevalā pratibhā*), sees it as having three origins, sometimes through grace (*prasāda*) coming from a god or from a *mahāpuruṣa* and sometimes acquired by *vyutpatti* or *abhyāsa* (*ibid.*, p. 26).

8. See DAṆḌIN, *Kāvya*. I, 104: *pūrvavāsanāguṇānubandhi pratibhānam adbhutam*; VĀMANA, *Kāvya-lamkāras*. I, 3, 16: *kavitvabijam pratibhānam* and in his *vṛtti* to this: *kavitvasya bijam kavitvabijam janmāntarāgatasaṁskāravīṣeṣaḥ kaścit*; similarly MAMMAṬA, *Kāvya-prakāśavṛtti* ad. I, 3: *śaktiḥ kavitvabijarūpaḥ saṁskāravīṣeṣaḥ*; RĀJAŚEKHARA, *Kāvya*. IV (GOS, p. 12): *janmāntarasamskārāpekṣiṇī sahajā*; the same thought is to be found in ABHINAVAGUPTA, *Abhinavabhāratī* VII, 2.

9. *apūrvavastunirmāṇakṣama*.

To gain a true understanding of the manner in which the *kavi* works it is necessary to bear in mind that most literary theorists do not consider *pratibhā* to be the only prerequisite for a career as a poet. In fact, none of the three qualifications we have discussed, poetic imagination, training and practice, is in itself sufficient; it is, as Mammaṭa expressly states, the combination of all these *kāvya* *hetus* that provides the common-ground (not: grounds) on which the successful creation and excellence of poetry may be built¹⁰. Even if poetic imagination was the decisive factor in the work of some writers, the poet's creative process was nevertheless strictly regulated by norms the observance and application of which were watched over by critics, fellow-poets and the *goṣṭhīs*. Classical poets also built their work on original concepts, but their inspiration was kept strictly within bounds. Their creative activity had to obey numerous objective laws, which tended to make poetic composition easier, and it had to follow conventions that laid down in detail the way in which many themes were to be dealt with. A great many themes and set phrases turn up again and again and although the rules were originally based on accepted practice, as in other literatures, they were further developed by theorists and these developments in their turn subsequently influenced poetic practice. As a result, what classical poetry offers us is a world that is to a certain extent predetermined, its raw material partly pre-set. The methods poets employ also show a tendency towards the reconstruction and reorganization of existing material into new combinations so that the poetic or artistic element frequently consists merely of novel, unusual or surprising juxtapositions of two or more standard components. This stock of themes and the associations that accompany them, which have been available since far earlier times, have been used by every poet to create situations and phrases. As he has inherited an exceedingly large number of themes, he generally chooses only a few of them but, if he is a master, he is careful always to find new combinations, new phrases and similes so as to give his theme or situation the brilliance of the hitherto unexpressed (*apūrva*) and thereby delight the educated reader.

This phenomenon is not limited to *kāvya* alone. We find a stock of given themes, situations and set phrases both in other highly-developed Indian literatures and in other eras (for instance in European Antiquity and, in India, in *Caṅkam* lyrical poetry written in Tamil) where fixed conventions, well-established by long and subtle use, relieved the poet of some of his labour. *kāvya* appears to have been particularly rich in patterns and set phrases such as these and, in fact, we discover few aspects of life that have not in some way or other been preconceived and already shaped, either *in toto* or in certain details, and which do not provide bricks that the poet is obliged to use in his construction.

10. *Kāvya* *prakāśavṛtti* ad I, 3: *trayaḥ samuditāḥ, na tu vyastāḥ, tasya kāvya-syodbhave nirmāṇe samullāse ca hetur na tu hetavaḥ.*

This can be studied to advantage in short poems (*muktaka*) and single stanzas from longer works which deal with the same theme. Let us choose as an example the monsoon, one of the favourite themes of Indian poetry, the correct literary description of which must contain a whole series of stereotyped elements. The list includes, for instance, clouds and wind; showers and lightning; rushing rivers swollen by rain; roads on which the dust has been laid; dancing, screaming peacocks gladdened by the sight of clouds; herons accompanying the clouds; the velvet-insect¹¹; *ketakī*, *kadamba*, *nīpa*, *nimba* and *kuṭaja*-blossom; the nightly love-promenades of young women (*abhisārikā*); the love games of the beloved in well-roofed dwellings protected from rain and storm; the traveller who, eagerly awaited by his beloved, hastens to set out on his journey home or who has arrived before the outbreak of the monsoon¹². When the poet wished to deal with the rainy season theme, he would immediately turn to these stock attributes¹³, employing at least one if the poem were short. In a longer poem he would probably use most of them. He could follow traditional practice even where details were concerned by making use of well-known expressions, similes and set phrases. When describing a cloud, for instance, he could compare its dark mass to a drum, a mountain or an elephant, or he could say of clouds that they were dense (*ghana*), hanging low (*avalambin*), bearing a burden of water (*toyabhāra*), or describe their denseness as a veil of cloud or a cover of cloud (*ghanapaṭala*, *jaladapaṭala*, *payodhara-paṭala*¹⁴), etc. However, even a tradition that placed as great an importance as *kāvya* did on common sources which had been handed down could realise that themes and set phrases might, in the end, become hackneyed. In order to avoid clichés, the poet could then renew these expressions by making them highly connotive or ambiguous, thus allowing them to be interpreted differently — in a spiritual or a witty manner — or use stock phrases and attributes in a new sense. What was important was that in every phase of the creative process the *kavi* had to choose between words from the literary and the non-literary vocabulary. To keep to our example of a cloud, he could select names like *ghana*, *jīmūta*, *balāhaka*, *megha*, or *ambuda*, *ambhoda*, *jalada*, *nīrada*, *payoda*, *vāriḍa* (bestowing water), *ambodhara*, *jaladhara*, *nīradhara*, *payodhara* (bearing water), or *jalavāha*, *vārivāha* (bringing water), *jalamuc*, *payomuc*, *vārimuc* (releasing water), etc. From among these, he would search

11. Generally called *indragopa*: a bright-red mite with a velvety skin incorrectly translated in some dictionaries as «Leuchtkäfer», Eng. «fire-fly»; cf. MONIER-WILLIAMS, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*.

12. It should be stressed that this list does not by any means cover all the possibilities, but only records the most important structures.

13. I use this term borrowed from art history to describe the various phenomena (e.g. «dancing peacocks») associated with a given theme (in this case, the monsoon theme).

14. Also similar compounds using other words for «cloud».

for just the expression that suited the context and the metre¹⁵. Let us look at a few stanzas.

*upari ghanam ghanapaṭalam tiryag girayo 'pi nartitamayūrāḥ /
kṣitir api kandaladhavalā dṛṣṭim pathikaḥ kva pātayati //*¹⁶

«On high a dense fabric of cloud. To one side, the mountains with dancing peacocks. The earth white with blossom: where is the traveller to look?» In this stanza by Bhartṛhari the much-loved phrase *ghanapaṭala* (veil of cloud) is modified by the adjective *ghana* (dense) which, being a homonym of the noun (*ghana*), gives the text greater interest. He also introduces a second and third attribute associated with rain — the dancing peacocks and the traveller.

This semi-automatic technique is pursued even further in another short poem in which we also find the expression *ghanapaṭala*. According to Vallabhadeva, the author is a poet called Vṛddhi, i.e., Śakravṛddhi. He plays with the words «clouds» (*payodhara*), «the disappearance of the dust» (*rajas*) and the «veil of clouds», but reinforces the poetic power of these elements by giving all of them double meanings:

*apagatarajovikārā ghanapaṭalakrāntatārakālokā /
lambapayodharamālā prāvṛḍ iyaṁ vṛddhavaniteva //*¹⁷

As the first three parts of the sentence, which are all ambiguous, refer both to the subject and the object of the comparison, we can translate either as: «This monsoon is like an aged woman; gone is the burden of the dust, clouds veil the light of the stars and multitudes of clouds hang down» or as «This monsoon is like an aged woman; she is free from the trouble of menstruation, her pupil is covered with coarse-grained cataract and her breasts hang down».

The comparison of a cloud to a loud drum is made in the two following verses. In the first, a stanza taken from Māgha's *Śiśupālavadha*, dancing peacocks are again introduced as an indication of the rain theme; in the second, whose author is said to be a certain Jayamāghava¹⁸, kadamba-blossom, a tree whose flowering is characteristic of this season:

*jaladapañktir anartayad unmadam kalavilāpi kalāpikadambakam /
kṛtasamārjanamardalamanḍaladhvanijayā nijayā svanasampadā //*¹⁹

15. Compounds such as *jalada*, *jaladhara*, *jalavāha*, *jalamuc*, etc. can act as models for other, possibly more complicated names.

16. BHARTṚHARI, *Śṛṅgāraś*. 92 (Kosmabī).

17. *Subhāṣitāvali* 1738; *Subhāṣitaratnaśoṣa* 231 (which has *payodharabhārā* instead of *-mālā*).

18. Vallabhadeva ad *Subhāṣitāvali* 1758.

19. *Śiśupālavadha* VI, 31.

« The row of clouds with its fullness of notes, which rumbled (like) the beat of a great many oiled drums, made the excited flock of sweetly calling peacocks dance ».

*atha manasijadigjayābhiṣaṃsī
jaladharadundubhir ātatāna śabdāṃ /
tadanu tadanujīvbhiḥ kadambaiḥ
kavicitam unmadaṣaṭpadacchalena //*²⁰

« Now resounded the rain-cloud drum which proclaimed the world-wide victory of the (King) God of Love. Then his servants, the kadambas, donned their armour, assuming the appearance of (dark-coloured) drunken bees ». Both poems are the product of highly-developed verbal artistry and show clearly, as does other poetry, how consciously Sanskrit writers worked on the construction of a *kāvya*. Their poems are in fact compositions and grow out of a clearly thought-out process based on a free but carefully made choice of all the elements. The process itself is governed by fixed rules which are valid for all poets. Far more important than the choice of themes, attributes, set phrases and words, however, is another process taking place at the same time; the organization and co-ordination of these elements at all levels, which gives the composition the quality of a work of art and, more than any other single act on the part of the poet, converts his ideas into reality. We can discern the watchful hand of a conscious artist behind both the above poems. Mastery of language is revealed in particular in the stanza by Māgha, who was recognized as a virtuoso. In accordance with an increasingly important principle, he makes the length of his sentence coincide with the stanza and builds up his verbal structure within this rhythmic-syntactic framework so that it is highly alliterative and at the same time shows agreement between expression and content. What strikes the cultivated reader is the novel use made of the cloud-drum attribute which Māgha clearly associates with the field of music:

Like trained birds, peacocks dance to the thunder of the clouds as if to the music of drums.

Jayamāghava, on the other hand, employs warlike imagery:

Like a king, the god Kāma proclaims his victory with drumbeats while those shown as his followers, the kadambas, put on their shining, dusky armour²¹.

The reader is shown a new aspect of reality by being presented with an attribute with which he is thoroughly acquainted in a sense that is

20. *Subhāṣitāvalī* 1758.

21. The way was prepared for this warlike imagery in the descriptions of rain in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Rtusamhāra*, in both of which clouds are compared to an army, a war-drum and a battle-flag; see V. RAGHAVAN, *Rtu in Sanskrit Literature*. Delhi, 1972 (= Saradiya Jnana Mahotsava Lecture Series), p. 16 and p. 47.

new and surprising. In other words, the poet paints the reader a picture in which all the details are familiar yet which strikes him as original because they are re-arranged into a quite new pattern. In both these poems, as in the two previously mentioned, it becomes evident that attributes are elements which can be handled with considerable freedom, whereas we recognize set phrases as being formed on typical models which have a tendency to recur with a fixed word-order if they are in the same sort of context. Indeed, they may even be so much a part of the attribute that they form its linguistic aspect. Something that set phrases have in common with poetic wording is that although, like the names of people, animals and things, other words may easily be substituted for the various elements they contain, they do not willingly change their structure. A poet using a set phrase meaning « veil of clouds » may replace the prior member of, for example, *ghanapaṭala* with some synonym and write *meghapāṭala*, *payodharapaṭala*, *jīmūtapāṭala*, etc. This enables almost any set phrase to be adapted rhythmically or from the assonance/consonance point of view to the metrical or contextual demands of the passage. We must, however, admit that in this case none of the variants contain the neat double meaning of *ghanapaṭala* — « veil of cloud » or « thick veil ». In *Śiṣupālavadha* VI, 31, Māgha uses the expression *jaladapaṅkti* for « row of clouds » as it is demanded in this context by the metre and the sound (the preference for the vowel *a* at the beginning of the stanza), but it can of course be varied (*ambudapaṅkti*, *jaladharapaṅkti*, *balāhakapaṅkti*, *ambudarekhā*, *jaladhara-rekhā*, *balāhakarekhā*, etc.). Jayamāghava, on the other hand, chooses the equally euphonious, metrically exactly correct *jaladharadundubhi* for « cloud drum », which can be replaced in other contexts by *megha-dundubhi*, *payodharadundubhi*, *meghamardala*, *payodharamardala*, etc.

Attributes occupy a far more important place in the poetic hierarchy than set phrases. One of their characteristics is that they have been able to preserve their poetic force throughout the development of *kāvya* due to the fact that it is possible to use them in ways that create a surprise effect. As they are continually being given new references, they are the material with which poetic pictures are made. Since the primary function of attributes was to show characteristics of the theme to be described, the predominant practice in older phases of *kāvya* was to give a long sequence of attributes, which usually consisted of merely naming conventional ones — although in considerable numbers and in some detail — either in a single stanza or at most in a few. In later times a different procedure was adopted: the aim of the poet became elaboration. Instead of a multiplicity, a minimum of attributes appeared in a single stanza: particularly when composing short poems, the poet now realized his ideas with the aid of only a few attributes which he scrutinized as it were close-up and, by the clever use of poetic figures (*alaṃkāra*), similes (*upamā*), witty interpretation (*ut-*

prekṣā), etc., gave the simple image a new and wider perspective. Sometimes he sought to confuse the reader, as perhaps Māgha did in the stanza quoted above. We cannot conclusively prove that the word *kadambaka* in *Śiṣupālavadhā* VI, 31 is really employed with this object in mind, but one might easily be misled by a superficial reading into thinking that the reference is to the kadamba-tree. A second reading soon corrects this misapprehension, for *kalāpi-kadambaka*, taken together, is a sort of periphrastic plural giving the meaning « host of peacocks ». However we judge this passage, this sort of concealed play on words and other elements is quite typical of literary texts in Sanskrit and Prākṛit.

We can follow the development from a sequence of attributes towards a concentration on only one or two in the following stanzas, all of which contain references to another conventional attribute associated with the monsoon theme — the previously mentioned rain-mite, Skt. *indragopa(ka)*, *śakragopa(ka)*. We find a sequence of attributes in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Kiṣkindhākāṇḍa* XXVIII, 41, which is admittedly only a very small part of a much longer, detailed description of the rainy season:

prahr̥ṣṭasaṃnāditabarhiṇāni saśakragopākulaśādvalāni /
caranti nīpārjunavāsītāni gajāḥ suramyāni vanāntarāni //

« Elephants move through charming, wooded strips of land in which peacocks cry joyfully and the juicy grass of which is full of rain-mites and the smell of Nīpa- and Arjuna-blossom ». The attributes listed here are: peacocks crying joyfully, grass that is juicy because of rain that has just fallen, rain-mites, Nīpa- and Arjuna-blossom. *Vikramāṅkadevacarita* XIII, 37 is also part of a long description of rain. Here the poet has made use of three attributes only: clouds, fresh grass and rain-mites. Nevertheless they are linked together into a single united image far better than in the stanza from the *Rāmāyaṇa*:

namaty ayaṃ śyāmalaśaṣpamaṇḍalasthitendragopapracayāsu
giristhalīṣu cyutaśakrakārmukabhramād ivodbhṛāntataḍidvilō-
vāridaḥ /
canah //

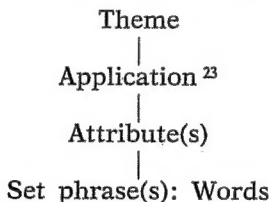
« Under the erroneous impression of (having seen) something like a fallen rainbow, the cloud bows its flashing eyes down to the mountain on whose patches of dark grass there are hosts of rain-mites ». What we see here is: the red *indragopa(ka)s*, here called *harigopa(ka)s*, are contrasted with the dark-green grass on the mountains thus creating the illusion of a red and green rainbow shining on the mountains where it has fallen. Filled with curiosity, the cloud bends down to examine the miraculous phenomenon with its eyes, the flashes of lightning. Uñchavṛtti is even bolder: he also uses clouds and *indragopas*, but

puts them into a most unusual relationship, creating new constellations which he employs with great poetic effect:

*bhraṣṭair meghaśukāghātadalitād arkadāḍimāt /
phalair iva mahī piṅgaiḥ pūrītā harigopakaiḥ //*²²

« The earth is filled with reddish-brown rain-mites: (they look) like the split seeds of a pomegranate-sun that has been broken into pieces by the hammering of parrots, (i.e.), of the clouds ».

If we sum up the above analyses, we come to the conclusion that classical poets built up their texts in several layers. Here we should like to emphasize once again that complicated, interwoven layers are not to be found in non-literary texts of an ordinary or scientific nature except in rudimentary form. When they do occur it is due to the influence of poetry, but they are not employed in a poetic manner, are not connected to each other and, above all, they are not worked out in detail. In *kāvya*, on the other hand, they form a hierarchy in the following order:



If we arrange the components of the above stanzas by Bhartṛhari, Śa-kravṛddhi, Māgha, Jayamāghava, Vālmīki and Bilhaṇa according to this model²⁴, we get:

Monsoon

A cloud looking at the rainbow created by *indragopas*;
Peacocks dancing to the drum-music of the clouds.

Clouds, rain-mites, peacocks, etc.

Various words for « clouds » such as *ghana*, *jalada*, *vārīda*, etc.

The order given here is not really as hierarchical as it appears. In fact, the various levels in a poem are not directly superimposed on one another; rather, they interact and thereby produce the typical density, the complexity and the structural formation of poetry. It is a characteristic of *kāvya* that the different layers are intimately related to each other and that the unity of a text is not to be assessed as the sum of

22. *Subhāṣitāvalī* 1722.

23. I employ this term to denote the use to which an attribute is put.

24. For the structure of classical Tamil lyrical poetry, cf. K. V. ZVELEBIL, *Tamil Literature*, Wiesbaden, 1974 (= *A History of Indian Literature* X, 1), p. 26 ff.

its parts, but as being due to this relationship and the complicated, often concealed interplay of the elements.

It is unfortunately not here possible to deal with all the fields in which the poet must exercise care and accuracy. We may regard suitability (*aucitya*) as being the guiding principle employed by the *kavi* in his choice of metre, word, style or attribute. On every level of *kāvya*, both from the point of view of sound and of intellectual content, it helped in the selection of those elements that best fitted the given theme. We saw above how a certain description governed the choice of definite attributes as far as content is concerned, and, if we read carefully, we shall discover that the same desire for accuracy also regulates the choice of similes, words, attributes and their application. They are all selected with an eye to their suitability and should be attuned as closely as possible to the sense of a stanza or to the atmosphere of a longer passage, a chapter or, indeed, even of a whole *kāvya*. In *Sarga XXII* of Bhaṭṭi's Rāma poem, usually known as *Bhaṭṭikāvya*, it is certainly not by chance, but by intention that the poet chooses the *Praharṣiṇī* (rejoicing) metre for two passages. Chapter XXII, which describes Rāma's and Sītā's final return to Ayodhyā, is the closing song of the poem. In stanzas 26 and 27 this metre, which moves briskly and expresses joy (notice the finite verb *nananda*, «rejoice») ²⁵, emphasizes Rāma's pleasure when, looking down from his air-borne chariot *Puṣpaka*, he beholds Mount Citrakūṭa and the Ganges beneath him:

ete te muniṇāmananditā digantāḥ
śailo 'yaṃ lalitavanaḥ sa citrakūṭaḥ /
gaṅgeyaṃ sutanu viśālātīraramyā
maithilyā raghutanayo diśan nananda //

«(Behold) here the regions embellished by (the presence of) ascetics, here Mount Citrakūṭa with its undulating forests and there, oh slim one ²⁶, the broad banks of the lovely Ganges. The descendant of Raghu ²⁷ rejoiced to show (all this) to Maithilī ²⁶».

Another example: The first song in the *Raghuvamśa* describes the visit of king Dilīpa and his consort to the grove of ascetics presided over by the sage Vasiṣṭha. Stanza 56 relates how they meet the guru after he has performed the twilight ceremonies. Kālidāsa portrays the scene in two short similes which may seem somewhat trivial at first sight. A re-reading, however, reveals an important characteristic of the poet's method. In this passage the seer Vasiṣṭha, who has great experience of sacrifices and has been credited with composing a large number of *Ṛgveda* hymns, and his wife Arundhatī are compared by Kālidāsa with concepts taken from the vocabulary of sacrifice and not with ideas

25. Kṣemendra (*Suvarṇatīlaka* II, 19) and others attest to the power of this metre to convey joy.

26. I.e., Sītā.

casually chosen from some other field of life. This is correct from the poetic point of view and is also in agreement with the principle of *aucitya*:

*vidheḥ sāyaṃtanasyānte sa dadarśa taponidhim /
anvāsitam arundhatyā svāhayeva havirbhujam //*

« At the conclusion of the twilight rites (King Dilipa) saw the treasure of asceticism²⁷, like a fire accompanied by the sacrificial cry "svāhā", whom²⁸ Arundhatī was assisting ». Observe that the simile is constructed with careful attention to gender: Vasiṣṭha is compared to fire, which is masculine in Sanskrit; Arundhatī to «svāhā», which is feminine. As slips are to be found even in the work of important poets, it is not unimportant to note the great pains Kālidāsa has taken to be accurate.

One does not have to read many literary texts before being struck by this endeavour to achieve accuracy. It is never the aim of a poet merely to give a beautiful poetic rendering of a theme. Going further than our conception of pure aesthetic effect, he attempts to build up the theme correctly from the objective point of view, that is to say to choose the right attributes, the right associations, etc. It is one of the characteristics of classical Indian poetry that the desire to give an exact description of an object extends down to the smallest details, which are carefully worked out so as to reflect the need to find the most appropriate expression for each attribute, the most suitable simile, etc. These strict requirements were not always easy to fulfil, for the author always ran the risk of discovering that he had neglected to pay sufficient attention to the poetic side of his work or to its scientific, learned aspects. The long history of *kāvya* shows that it was, in fact, perfectly possible to meet all these requirements. The delicate balance between poetic genius and exact description is masterfully maintained in quite a few poems and both readers and listeners, the connoisseurs, were highly conscious of the fact that each of these two aspects formed part of the enjoyment of poetry. Discussions in critical works and in commentaries to individual *kāvyas* take up questions both of expression and of content and let it clearly be understood that, in their opinion, the presence of factual errors will diminish the value of a *kāvya*.

We must judge the nature and personality of the classical Indian poet from a quite different standpoint than that taken when considering writers in the Western tradition or modern authors. Above all it would be wrong to think of him as being in some way related to the European idea of a Romantic poet — drunk with daemonic inspiration, his head in the clouds, writing to fulfil his artistic nature. With the exception of certain holy men belonging to later religious groups or sects in whom a burning devotion to God (*bhakti*), mixed in some cases with Tantric

27. I.e., Rāma.

28. Vasiṣṭha.

beliefs, might lead to transports of spontaneous poetry²⁹, and also with the possible exception of the Vedic poet-seer, the concept of the undisciplined poet autoschediastically composing great works with a sort of somnambulistic certainty is entirely alien to the Indian tradition. The attitude of the *kavi* was totally different. He worked at his text in a deliberate manner and, governed by a host of rules and norms, put his lines carefully together. In actual fact, not one single Sanskrit or Prākṛit poem gives any hint of a state resembling Cicero's *afflatus quasi furoris*. If the Indian poet could create imagery that far exceeded in boldness anything that his Western counterpart produced, his methods of work and even his poetic imagination (*pratibhā*) were constantly held in check. Moreover, definite procedures such as the realization of the poet's intentions in similes containing several members, in paronomasia (*śleṣa*) or in the implied (*dhvani*) left no room for the blind dictates of grandiose inspiration. It was one of the conditions of *kāvya* not only that the message should conform to the poetic codex in the narrow sense, but also that it should be factually correct. Naturally, this did not mean that the classical poet was not free to follow a flash of inspiration or some subconscious mental process if he wished. What was essential was that whatever he wrote, whether it was the result of plodding labour or of inspiration, should be submitted to rigorous criticism, have its accuracy checked and be corrected if necessary. The disciplined poet was not prepared to write haphazardly and at irregular intervals but set aside a definite period of time for each step in the creative process, including re-reading, revision and improvement. It cannot be denied that this conscientious, somewhat hide-bound attitude of authors to their work had a conservative effect and is therefore partly responsible for the great unity — uniformity even — of classical poetry. We observe time and again that the differences between one poet and another as far as their manner of writing is concerned are not normally in essentials. They seldom contravene either the themes or the forms sanctioned by tradition, but are clearly a matter of detail. As the history of *kāvya* shows, individual authors sought renewal and effect primarily through profundity and, when attempting something new, did not allow the novelty of their work to express itself in drastic changes but rather in ever greater refinement, by surpassing either earlier poetry or, more commonly, similar works by other poets.

29. One of the best examples is the Bauls of Bengal.